

Message Text

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65

ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00

FMC-02 INR-07 NSAE-00 CG-00 OFA-01 DLOS-04 AID-05

CEA-01 FRB-01 CIEP-02 SP-02 STR-04 TRSE-00 LAB-04

SIL-01 SAM-01 OMB-01 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 /074 W

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R 311701Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5313

INFO AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONGEN ANTWERP

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 9832

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EWWT, BE

SUBJECT: TWO-MONTH STRIKE/BLOCKADE OF BELGIAN INLAND WATERWAYS
ENDS IN PARTIAL VICTORY FOR BARGE OWNERS

REF: BRUSSELS 08897 NOTAL

1. BARGE OPERATOR/OWNER STRIKE WHICH BEGAN IN LATE AUGUST FINALLY ENDED OCTOBER 30 WHEN LAST BLOCKADES ON INLAND WATERWAYS WERE LIFTED. MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS CHABERT, AFTER THREATENING USE OF FORCE TO CARRY OUT REQUISITIONING EARLY IN OCTOBER (REFTEL), PURSUED NEGOTIATIONS AND FINALLY ACHIEVED PARTIAL AGREEMENT WHICH GIVES SOME SATISFACTION TO OPERATORS' DEMANDS. HOWEVER, PART OF AGREEMENT WHICH INVOLVES UNDERSTANDINGS TO BE WORKED OUT BY CHABERT WITH NETHERLANDS GOVERNMENT REMAINS TO BE COMPLETED. NEVERTHELESS, BARGE OPERATOR LEADERS JUDGED THEY GOT AS MUCH AS THEY COULD HOPE FOR AND FINALLY CONVINCED RANK AND FILE TO ACCEPT THIS AGREEMENT. ECONOMIC PLIGHT OF MANY SMALL OPERATORS IS SERIOUS AFTER THIS PROLONGED HOLDOUT. MUCH OF THEIR CUSTOMARY BUSINESS HAS BEEN LOST TO ROAD TRANSPORT COMPANIES. IRONICALLY,
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HOWEVER, LATTER ARE NOW THREATENING TO STRIKE NOVEMBER 3 IF THEIR

OWN SEPARATE DEMANDS ARE NOT SATISFIED. THIS DISPUTE ALSO IS IN
LAP OF COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER.

2. COMMENT: STRIKE HAS ENABLED BARGE OPERATORS TO FORGE
A SINGLE ORGANIZATION WHICH COULD AGAIN MOUNT A TOTAL BLOCKADE
IF BARGE OPERATORS BECOME DISSATISFIED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF
THIS PARTIAL AGREEMENT AND PARTICULARLY WITH OUTCOME OF
CHABERT'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE DUTCH. IF TRUCKERS STRIKE,
BARGE OPERATORS WOULD BE IN POSITION,IF THEY CHOSE TO
REIMPOSE BARGE TRAFFIC STOPPAGE, TO BRING FREIGHT MOVEMENT
TO A NEAR STANDSTILL NATIONWIDE WITH SERIOUS DEPRESSIVE EFFECT
ON NATIONAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.
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